

## SYNOPSIS

*The Dean's December*, Bellow's first novel after he won the Pulitzer Prize in fiction for another work *Humboldt's Gift* (1975) is a masterful study of dissolution within an American academic community, in the urban street life of Chicago and under oppressive communist regime in Bucharest, Romania.

In *The Dean's December*, the central protagonist is Dean Albert Corde. Dean Albert Corde, a dean in an unnamed faculty in Chicago and a resident of Chicago. He seems to be about 60. For years he had been a journalist, an observer and an outsider. However, he has left that world since he decides to be a dean. His wife, Minna is another kind of observer. She is an astronomer distinguished enough to rate a week's residence at the Mt. Palomar Observatory.

The story begins when he travels with his Rumanian wife, Minna, back to her home country and dying process of her famous mother. The weather of an East European winter makes the situation even colder by the Communist dictatorship whose presence everywhere around the country. The communist securities are not happy about them, Minna is regarded as a defector since she decides to move from Rumania to America and gets married with an American man. Minna's mother is a formerly powerful party official who has been detested for allowing her daughter to emigrate to the West.

Corde in Bucharest has a little thing to do then he spends hours sitting in Minna's girlhood room thinking about the problem he has left behind in Chicago; his student's murder by two street blacks, his revolting nephew's championing of these killers and the article he has written for Harper's magazine. In fact Corde should have been happy to get away from all that and come to Bucharest. However, in Bucharest there is a hostile bureaucracy, a dark, cold apartment, and a gothic toilet. "If emigration were permitted the country would be empty in less than a month," Corde thinks. Not only the miserable condition of the country, the attitudes of Rumanian government also seem to break its citizen right. Corde finds out that there are many similar things that make this two different countries become the same

dehumanized country. As a capitalist country, America gives freedom to its citizen in doing anything. The worst thing is that many of people misuse this condition to do some crimes. Therefore, Corde concludes that moral crisis is happening in America at the moment. Comparing with the capitalist country, America, the communist country, Rumania appears as a strict country, where its entire citizen is limited to talk about something or with whom they talk. "All conversation with foreigners had to be reported. Few people were bold enough to visit the American library. Those who sat in the reading room were probably secret agents. It was one of the greatest achievement of Communism to seal off so many millions people" (62)

So, besides the story of the death of an old woman in Bucharest, the story also about the cruelty in the earth and the evil man does to his fellows. As the book goes, Corde continues to rewrite his Harper's articles inside his own head. And at the same time he is asking himself whether he ought to accept an invitation to engage in another public involvement.

## BIOGRAPHY

Saul Bellow is a Jewish – American writer. He was born in Lachine, Quebec, Canada, 10<sup>th</sup> of June 1915 as the youngest of four children from Russian – Jewish parents. Two years before, his parents had emigrated from St. Petersburg, Russia. He was raised in the Rachel Market section of Montreal. In 1924, his family moved to Chicago. In his early youth he received a conventional religious education, but he appeared from the American university system with the introductory training of a social scientist. He received a trilingual custom of Yiddish, English, and French. He attended the University of Chicago (1933-1935), taking his degree from Northwestern University in 1937 with honors in anthropology and sociology. He also served in United State Marine in 1944-1945. He taught at Northwestern and Chicago University as anthropologist and taught creative writing at Princeton. After being appointed to the committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago, he found his world, the world of writing. All of his life background has its own role to influence Bellow in writing the novel. The cultural background and also his education background.

Bellow's first several novels were dark studies of people caught in a harsh world which beat them down, even the titles reflect this naturalistic cynicism: novel *The Dangling Man* published in 1944 and *The Victim* (1947). In later years, Bellow moved away from these themes and created a novel which had both angst and suffering but also a great deal of humor and love of life. It can be seen soon after, Saul Bellow received a Guggenheim fellowship, on which he traveled to France and wrote his masterpiece, *The Adventure of Augie March*, which won the National Book Award in 1954, here Bellow started to develop characters who survive modern life by seeing the humor in their own absurdity. Bellow had married several times, his first wife was Anita Goshkin married in 1937 (divorced), second wife was Alexandra Tschacbasov married in 1956 (divorced) then Susan Glassmann married in 1961 and had three children. However, his marriages influence him to write in one of his novels about the problems of marriage relationships; *Herzog*. *Mr. Sammler's Planet* that was

published in 1970 and won National Book Award in 1971 told about Jewish intellectuals fighting the spiritual depression around them. In 1976 he received Nobel Prize in Literature for *Humboldt's Gift* and it also became an international best seller and won the "Prix International de Literature". In 1976, he also wrote a short story, "To Jerusalem and Back", about a trip to Israel. The next novel is *More Die of Heartbreak* (1987), Bellow returns to a midwestern setting then it followed with *All Adds Up*, an essay collection in 1994 and *the Actual* (1997) here Bellow refocused in brief on many the themes from his fiction of the past 50 years.

Even he has changed his themes several times, there is a theme that almost always comes up in all his works. One theme that becomes his major theme is the life of a Jewish man who lives in a country. He creates what has been called the "Bellow hero." Usually a Jewish male, living in the city, enmeshed in personal problems who faces life with humor. Then, he also has a distinctive feature in writing his works. Bellow often writes from a first-person point of view, from a character's perspective who may ramble in his thought, including all kind of details, and whom, through a series episodes, narrates the story of his life.

<http://www.britanica.com/frm.redir/jsp.quesy=saul+bellow&redir>).